

The Impromptu Cousin



By
MONTAGUE GLASS
Author of POTASH
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At three o'clock of a mild October morning two dusty, brown objects, one large and one small, were cast from the Harrisburg Limited at Columbia Crossroads. The limited was making a good twenty miles an hour, and both packages bounced violently and then sagged together into a small heap on the station platform. Each suffered from the impact. A thin trickle of blood oozed from the larger object, which was St. Louis Pete; while the smaller one, which was a United States mail-pouch, sustained a rent in its side and most of its contents were scattered under an adjacent baggage-truck.

At a quarter past three Pete sat up and gingerly felt the end of his nose with his fingertips.

"Youse kin main me," he murmured, "but youse can't kill me!" Then, with a groan, he rose to his feet and tentatively shook out his legs.

"No bones cracked," he said, "and—holly cripes, wot's dis?"

He stopped and grabbed the torn pouch, whereat two letters and a postal card tumbled upon the platform. These he gathered up, together with the three envelopes beneath the truck, and thrust them into the bosom of his ragged shirt.

"Dey sure gits a heavy mail in dis burg!" he continued, and slunk down the track to where a switch-lamp gleamed on the freight-siding.

There he crouched beside the light and carefully drew the letters from his shirt. The first two bore the imprint of a mail-order house, and these he laid to one side. An oath of pleasurable surprise marked the opening of the third, for a crisp dollar bill reposed inside. He pulled out the green-back, together with its accompanying message, and spread the letter on his knee. It was headed "Denmark Center," and read:

Dear Sir:
I am sending you a dollar this week not two because my wife is sick and I ain't got the two. This makes a balance of five dollars on the third note, and three dollar interest what we agreed on. Respectful,

ANSON BURRITT.
Pete picked up the envelope. It was addressed to "Hiram Towners, Columbia X-Roads."

The next missive was a postal card directed to Miss Ethel Towners, and reading as follows:

Cyprus, Pa.

Dear Niece:
Expect your aunt and me home on Saturday. I must tell you that our cousin, Charles Parshall, who you have never seen, is visiting East from Oklahoma, and will probably stop off to the X-Roads on No. 2 tomorrow, Friday. He is a bit hearty and rough in his manner, but give him the spare room and get Elezea Wouters to sleep with you. He will wait till we come. Your uncle,

HIRAM TOWNERS.

Pete next examined the remaining envelope, and the chuckle with which he recognized the name of Hiram Towners merged into a grunt of disappointment when he found no money enclosed. Again he applied himself to the deciphering of the script—which, for Pete, was a task of no mean proportion. He made it out thus:

Dear Cousin Hiram:

When I seen you in Cyprus yesterday I thought as how I would pass through Columbia Crossroads on Friday. Well, Hiram, I can't do it, but must be in N. Y. City on Friday, so I write to tell you that I can't. I am sorry about it, but will write you before I leave for Okla.

I am your cousin,

CHARLES PARSHALL.

Pete looked up into the sky, where a fat October moon was paling to the dawn.

"I am your cousin, Charles Parshall," he quoted. "Dere ain't narten de matter with dat idea, neider!"

Sounds of tuneless whistling came down the road which skirted the track, and Pete gathered up his plunder. He slipped hastily toward the station platform and replaced the two mail-order letters and the postal card addressed to Miss Ethel Towners in the torn sack. Then he dodged behind the small shanty that served as a waiting room and ticket-office.

The tuneless whistle drew nearer, and at length embodied itself in the person of Henry Wouters, the postmaster of Columbia Crossroads.

"Busted agin!" said Henry in matter-of-fact tones, as he picked up the pouch.

He slid the two letters and the

postal out of the bag, which he slung over his shoulder, and, resuming his musical exercise, slouched off up the road.

Pete emerged from his hiding place and sighed heavily. Oh, the luxury of a clean, sweet-smelling bed for just one night! he reflected.

"An' I bet she cooks good pancakes, too," he said aloud. He hung his head irresolutely.

"Wild real maple syrup," he went on, "wid real—By ginger, I'll do it, if I got to blow in dat whole dollar for soap!"

II.

True, the hat, an old broad-brimmed Stetson, had been intended for a head two sizes larger than Pete's; but when he cocked it to one side the effect was rakish and the misfit barely apparent.

He had been bathed and shaved and his shoes had been polished, so there was nothing about him that suggested the hobo.

He had discreetly effaced himself during the ninety-second stop at Columbia Crossroads, and it was only when the train had gained some headway as it left the station that he jumped shily to the side of the track. In his right hand he grasped a brand-new valise which two hours before had hung from the front of a trunk store in Denmark while the proprietor was busy inside. It was now weighted with two bricks and securely locked, and as Pete stepped on the station platform Henry Wouters rushed forward to relieve him of it.

"Could youse direct me, now, to Mr. Hiram Towners' place?" he asked aloud.

"I suttinly kin," he replied. "You be Mr. Towners' cousin from Oklyhomy?"

"Dat's me," Pete said.

"Well, now," Henry went on, "that's wot I thought. I got my buggy outside, and I'm a goin' to drive you up."

Ten minutes later they drew up at the Towners' side porch; and twenty minutes later Pete was regaling himself with fried ham and hot biscuit, and Miss Ethel Towners and Elezea Wouters, Henry's sister, with as blood-curdling yawns of fighting Indians down in Oklahoma as his imagination and a dim recollection of his dime novel days could supply.

"Yes, ma'am," he said through a heavy mouthful of creamed potatoes: "dere wuz fifty of 'em, an' I fought my way trough de hull bunch."

"And did you kill any of them?" Miss Towners asked.

She was a timid spinster of thirty, with a pleasant face and large gray eyes, and she hums on Pete's every word like a second Desdemona.

"Only six," said Pete modestly.

Miss Towners gave a little cry and Elezea Wouters gasped. Miss Wouters was about forty, and her red face fairly glowed with interest in Pete's moving tale.

He continued to refresh old Headie novels for the benefit of the two women until the kitchen clock chimed ten.

"Mersey me!" Miss Towners cried. "It's bedtime!"

When the house was locked up Elezea Wouters showed the guest up to the spare room on the second floor.

"You'll practically have the whole house to yourself," she said. "Miss Towners an' me will sleep in the wing."

"I hope you ain't goin' ter have no nightmare," said Pete.

"I hope not," Elezea replied doubtfully. "I guess you won't."

Pete looked at the snowy bed and

the neat, homelike furnishing of the room.

"No," he said, heaving a great sigh, "I guess I won't!"

III.

For a minute Pete listened to the retreat of Elezea's ponderous tread on the stairs; but after a door slammed in the distance he stretched himself luxuriously.

"Dis," he chuckled, "is a little bit of all right. I could stand dis tree hundred an' seventy-five nights in de year."

He slipped around the room and opened and closed closet doors. At

length the faint murmur of the two women's conversation ceased and, shading his lamp with his hand, Pete explored the mysteries of the hall.

The next room, evidently that of his host, contained, in addition to the ordinary furniture of a bedroom, a small safe and a roll-top desk. By force of habit Pete whipped out his knife and forthwith attacked the lock of the desk. It yielded almost immediately and Pete lost no time in investigating the neat little bundle of papers in the pigeonholes.

He drew up a chair and set himself to systematic and thorough examination of each envelope. There was much correspondence, of a sort which indicated Mr. Towners' business of note-shaving and money lending to be in a flourishing condition. One pile of envelopes contained nothing but letters from Anson Burritt. They disclosed that a debt originally contracted for fifty dollars one year before had swollen to almost two hundred dollars by process of interest on interest and fees for drawing legal papers.

In addition, there were six promissory notes for varying amounts. Pete thrust all of them, together with the correspondence, into his breast-pocket.

Thence he passed to the perusal of other letters. So interested was he in the tales of usury they recounted that he entirely failed to notice the light creak of a footstep on the stair outside. Nor did he so much as lift his eyes from the absorbing page until a cold sensation in the back of his neck made him straighten up.

"Not a peep," said a hoarse, familar voice, "or I'll blow yer nut awf!"

Mechanically Pete raised his hands above his head and faced slowly round.

"Hole-in-the-Cheek!" he exclaimed. "St. Louis Pete!" the other gasped, lowering his revolver. "Wot in Sam Hill are youse doin' here?"

"Put down dat gun an' I'll tell yer," Pete replied.

Hole-in-the-Cheek laughed softly. "It ain't loaded," he said.

He was short and thin, as becomes a porch-climber, and when he spoke he thrust his chin forward after the fashion of Chatham square.

"Oh, it ain't loaded, ain't it?" Pete jeered, and stepped back nimbly.

The next moment two dull smacks announced the impact of Pete's left and right on Hole-in-the-Cheek's jaw. It was a clean knockout, and the yegman crumpled up on the carpeted floor.

Pete stood over him with his eyes ablaze.

"Had to butt in, hadn't yer?" he said bitterly, addressing the prostrate and unconscious burglar. "Couldn't take de hint when I chalked it up on de date for yer!"

Vigorously he jerked the sheets from Hiram Towners' bed and ripped them into long strips with his jack-knife. Never was there so complete a job of trussing as Pete made of it. When he finished Hole-in-the-Cheek lay effectually bound in double-knotted thongs and gagged with an inkwell and a towel. As a finishing touch Pete drew a pillow slip over his unconscious victim's head.

"Under de bed fer yours!" he muttered, and rolled Hole-in-the-Cheek over the carpet.

IV.

At seven the next morning Pete awoke to the sound of a vigorous bell-ringing below stairs. He scrambled out of bed and opened the door.

"I knew ut!" he muttered, sniffing a current of air which came up the stairway. "Pancakes 'n' sassafras 'n' cawfee!"

He performed his toilet with the rapidity of a city fireman and in five minutes he seated himself at the breakfast table in front of a pile of smoking buckwheats.

"Tuck right in, Mr. Parshall," said Elezea. "It ain't often ye get real



"Dat's Me," Pete Said.

Cyprus county buckwheat and sur-rup."

Pete needed no further invitation, and the luscious cakes followed one another down his throat as if they were affixed to a patent belt-conveyor.

Little pork sausages to the number of ten accompanied the pancakes, and three cups of coffee helped to wash it all down. At length he drew his chair back, stretched his legs and heaved a contented sigh.

"Well, ladies," he said, "I must say dat—"

But the remainder of the compliment remained unuttered, for at this juncture a tremendous banging on the floor above brought down small flakes of plaster on Miss Towners' table and the house rocked with the commotion.

Elezea shrieked and clutched at the tablecloth, while Miss Towners sat bolt upright and turned white.

"Land o' Goshen!" she cried in a full of the noise. "What is that?"

Pete rose to his feet in a carefully devised attitude of strained attention.

"It sounds to me," he said, after another series of bangs, "like dere wuz somebody up dere. Have youse got a revolver in de house?"

Miss Towners pointed tremblingly to a shelf in the kitchen and Pete at once seized the firearm from between the tea-caddy and the saltbox. Its six chambers were loaded.

Thrusting it into his coat pocket, Pete took the stairs three at a jump. Immediately thereafter Miss Towners and Elezea ran into the front yard and, standing at the gate, uttered screams after screams.

"Just as if dey wuz paid fer it," Pete thought.

He entered his host's bedroom and carefully fired three shots through the front window, whereat the quality of Miss Towners' screams became doubly piercing.

Then Pete tore the sheets, mattress and springs from the bed and exposed the bound and half-suffocated yegman. Hole-in-the-Cheek wriggled like a snake, but his thongs held fast.

"Youse do wot I tell yer," Pete cried, "or I'll put a slug inter yer an' finish de job!"

He lifted Hole-in-the-Cheek from the bottom of the bed and set him against the wall. Then he removed the gag. As soon as the burglar could enunciate a stream of profanity issued forth, all of which caused a broad grin on Pete's face.

"Keep it up!" he said. "Keep it up! Ye're boostin' me game."

For five minutes Pete turned over chairs and knocked down pictures in dramatic counterfeit of a struggle to the death. After this there was a stillness of about ten minutes, during which he rocked and wheezed in an ecstasy of mirth. Then he seized the mummy-wrapped Hole-in-the-Cheek and bore him wriggling down the stairs.

When he appeared at the front door Miss Towners lay on the grass-plot in a swoon, while Elezea was opening and closing her mouth with spasmodic regularity. No sound came from her lips, however, for she had shrieked herself into complete silence.

Pete cast his burden on the ground. "Dat's wot we do to 'em in Oklahoma!" he said.

Aided by Elezea, he harnessed Hiram Towners' best mare to the family wagon and in ten minutes he was driving rapidly down the highway toward the station with Hole-in-the-Cheek doubled up under the rear seat, as incapable of motion as a sack of potatoes.

The jolting of the wagon, however, seemed to revive the yegman's vocal powers, and he gushed out blasphemy in such profusion that it made his first ungagged efforts in the bedroom seem like the small talk of a mothers' meeting.

"Hole-in-the-Cheek," he said solemnly, "youse wouldn't dast gimme dat line of talk if youse was untied."

Hole-in-the-Cheek's reply to this observation was at first an incoherent frothing at the mouth. Later, by eliminating the expletives, which outnumbered the significant words by ten to one, Pete gathered that the yegman invited anyone to unwind him and try. Pete whipped out his jack-knife and, leaning over the back of his seat, with a few deft slashes rid Hole-in-the-Cheek of his many wrappings.

"Now come on, you four-flushing hobo!" he said, and danced in circles around Pete. "Come on! Youse can put me to sleep when I ain't lookin'! Do it now, when I'm ready for yer!"

Pete clinched and unclenched his fists. It might, after all, he reflected, lend the necessary air of verisimilitude if he went back to the Towners' house with a bleeding nose or a black eye. A stinging blow in the ear crystallized his indecision, and he faced Hole-in-the-Cheek, confident, with his superior height and reach, of his ability to knock out the yegman in one round.

There was blood in the yegman's eyes as he feinted and circled around his opponent, and Pete had all he could do to ward off the nasty little jabs that Hole-in-the-Cheek aimed at him. It was at this juncture that Towners' mare, the instrument and agent of poetic justice, emitted a strident neigh. Pete's eyes shifted from the direction of his antagonist for just one instant, but in that brief moment the mischief was done.

Five blows smacked on his law with the precision and noise of an automatic pistol. Earth and heaven reeled for the hobo and vanished into darkness, taking with them—to complete the metaphor—Pete's every chance of chicken fricassee with beaten biscuit; for it was not until an hour later that he came out of his stupor and scrambled painfully to his feet.

Simultaneously, in the town of Denmark, ten miles distant, Hole-in-the-Cheek emerged from the Blue Front Livery and Sale stables and carefully tucked away a fifty dollar bill, the exact price he had received for the Towners' mare and family wagon.

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stationery, "I didn't know you had any home folks."

Pete grunted in reply and took his booty to a nearby table. Here he squared his elbows and, with lolling tongue and a furrowed brow, directed the envelope to "Anson Burritt, Denmark Center, Pa." Then he inclosed the six notes, after carefully tearing off the signatures, and finally addressed himself to the writing of the following letter:

"Dear Sir: Inclose is the notes you give Hiram Towners. I tore off the names. He siterly dun you good. If you pay him enny more you are a bigger fool than I am—and that's goin' sum. Your friend,

"ST. LOOEY PETE."

Washington, D. C.—Alum baking powders are no more harmful to a person than any other baking powders.

Such is the conclusion of the referee board of consulting scientific experts of the department of agriculture as the result of experiments to determine the influence of aluminum compounds on the nutrition and health of man. The report gives the results of three sets of extensive experiments on human subjects conducted independently by members of the board and was in response to questions put to it by the department of agriculture. The board's report was unanimous and was signed by Ira Remsen, president of Johns Hopkins University, Chairman; Russell H. Critchfield, professor of physiological chemistry in Yale university and director of the Sheffield Scientific school; John H. Long, professor of chemistry in Northwestern university; Alonzo E. Taylor, professor of physiological chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania, and Theobald Smith, professor of comparative pathology in Harvard.

Putting It Up to Me.

"Pop!"

"Yes, my son."

"What is this war about over in Europe?"

"Don't know, my boy, but you might ask your mother. She knows a lot about fighting."

QUIT MEAT IF KIDNEYS BOTHER AND USE SALTS

Take a Glass of Salts Before Breakfast if Your Back is Hurting or Bladder is Irritated.

If you must have your meat every day, eat it, but flush your kidneys with salts occasionally, says a noted authority who tells us that meat forms uric acid which almost paralyzes the kidneys in their efforts to expel it from the blood. They become sluggish and weaken, then you suffer with a dull misery in the kidney region, sharp pains in the back or sick headache, dizziness, your stomach sours, tongue is coated and when the weather is bad you have rheumatic twinges. The urine gets cloudy, full of sediment, the channels often get sore and irritated, obliging you to seek relief two or three times during the night.

To neutralize these irritating acids, to cleanse the kidneys and flush off the body's urinous waste get four ounces of Jad Salts from any pharmacy here; take a tablespoonful in a glass of water before breakfast for a few days and your kidneys will then act fine. This famous salt is made from the acids of grapes and lemon juice, combined with lithia, and has been used for generations to flush and stimulate sluggish kidneys, also to neutralize the acids in urine, so it no longer irritates, thus ending bladder weakness.

Jad Salts is inexpensive; cannot injure, and makes a delightful effervescent lithia-water drink.—Adv.

If the silly actions of a man are not due to his being in love, they are probably natural.

Nothing equals Dean's Mentholated Cough Drops for Bronchial weakness, sore chests, and throat troubles—3c at all Druggists.

Everywhere in life the question is not what we gain, but what we do.—Carlyle.

Makes the laundress happy—that's Red Cross Big Blue. Makes the washer white clothes. All good grocers. Adv.

Ohio now has 5,525 saloons. In 1905 it had 12,000.

ENDS DYSPEPSIA, INDIGESTION, GAS

"Pape's Diapiesin" cures sick, sour stomachs in five minutes—Time It!

"Really does" put bad stomachs in order—"really does" overcome indigestion, dyspepsia, gas, heartburn and sourness in five minutes—that—just that—makes Pape's Diapiesin the largest selling stomach regulator in the world. If what you eat ferments into stubborn lumps, you belch gas and eructate sour, undigested food and acid; head is dizzy and aches; breath foul; tongue coated; your insides filled with bile and indigestible waste, remember the moment "Pape's Diapiesin" comes in contact with the stomach all such distress vanishes. It's truly astonishing—almost marvelous, and the joy is its harmlessness.

A large fifty-cent case of Pape's Diapiesin will give you a hundred dollars' worth of satisfaction.

It's worth its weight in gold to men and women who can't get their stomachs regulated. It belongs in your home—should always be kept handy in case of sick, sour, upset stomach during the day or at night. It's the quickest, surest and most harmless stomach doctor in the world.—Adv.

His Mistake.

"John," she said to her husband, who was grumbling over his breakfast, "your love has grown cold."

"No, it hasn't," he snapped; "but my breakfast has."

"That's just it! If your love hadn't grown cold you wouldn't have noticed that your breakfast had."—Stray Stories.

NO BAKING POWDER MORE WHOLESOME THAN ALUM POWDERS.

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WHO COMPELS YOU TO ACT?

That All Action is of One's Own Volition is a Fact to Be Kept in the Mind.

Don't you fool yourself with the idea that you are compelled to do or be anything. You are not doing